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ABSTRACT

This document describes six alternative educational centers in the Wichita Public School System: (1) a program designed for students with talent in academic subjects or in the performing arts; (2) a program providing educationally meaningful learning in a disciplined environment; (3) a non-graded, multi-age program conducive to learning through environmental education, continuous progress and affective education; (4) a non-graded, multi-age setting committed to a continuous, personalized process of learning; (5) a junior high for pupils who have not responded to more traditional approaches; and (6) a high school designed to meet the educational needs of students who have not remained in the high school until graduation. (PN)

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Different Drummers

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Alternative School Opportunities in the Wichita Public Schools Wichita, Kansas

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."

— *Henry David Thoreau*

Wichita Board of Education
1980-81

John C. Frye, president
Albert Kirk, vice president
Joyce Focht
Sheldon Kamen
Dr. Kenneth Kimbell
Patricia King
Jo Ann Pottorff

"Each individual is a unique and very special kind of being. Each comes with a learning or a teaching style designed exclusively for him. When learning styles and teaching styles are compatible within the educational setting, learning is greatly enhanced!"

— *Dr. Mario Fantini*
Father of Alternative Education

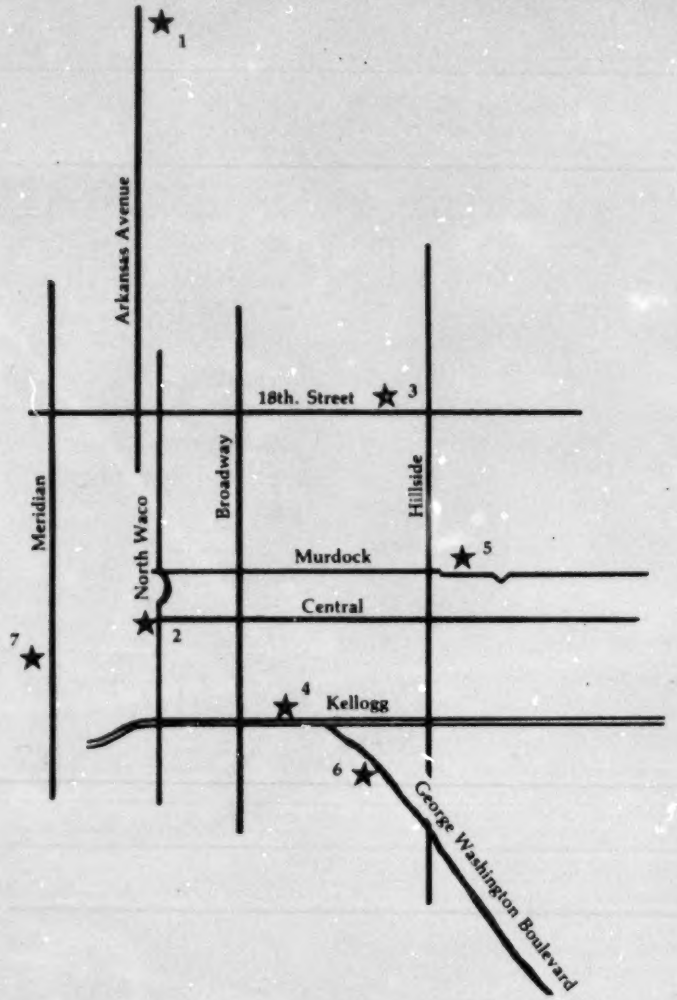
Alternative Education In Wichita

Although all schools in the Wichita Public School System follow the same general curriculum and adhere to the rules and regulations adopted by the district's Board of Education, each school also prides itself on its uniqueness. Six schools are especially unique by virtue of having been authorized to establish and operate alternative programs. Each of the six alternative centers (1) operates an instructional program which differs in approach from that of the "regular" school, (2) operates all phases of the school consistently within that particular alternative style, and (3) accepts students from throughout the district rather than from only a limited attendance area.

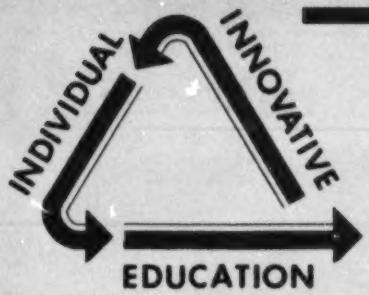
The need for alternative education programs — whether they are housed within conventional schools or located in a separate alternative center — is created by the great diversity among people in a metropolitan area. Different learning styles among students and different life styles among families suggest the need for multiple teaching approaches. The majority of students are well served in the regular schools of the Wichita Public School System, but the existence of the six alternative centers creates options for students and parents who desire and can benefit from alternative experiences. The regular school and the alternative school are mutually supportive, not competitive. Together, they create a wide choice of educational options.

A districtwide Alternative Education Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives from each alternative school in addition to members-at-large from the total school district, serves as an advisory group to the Board of Education and administration regarding alternative programs. The membership of the committee is approximately fifty-five percent (55%) lay people and forty-five percent (45%) professional educators, with a chairperson elected from the membership.

Locations of Wichita's alternative schools



1. Earhart Environmental Complex
   4401 Arkansas Avenue
2. Emerson Open Alternative School
   445 North Waco
3. Isely School
   2500 East 18th
4. Kellogg Traditional Alternative School
   1220 East Kellogg
5. Alcott Alternative Learning Center
   3400 East Murdock
6. Wichita High School Metro — Boulevard
   751 George Washington Boulevard
7. Wichita High School Metro-Meridian
   301 South Meridian



ISELY

Isely School

Location: 2500 East 18th
Telephone: 682-5931
Grades served: 4-6
Enrollment: 225

Isely School draws students from grades 4, 5 and 6, with the school's program organized in a nongraded pattern. Isely uses an individualized approach for instruction, teaching both on an individual level and in groups. Small groups or large, multi-age combinations are used whenever appropriate. The school emphasizes attitudes of respect and mutual trust, as well as the importance of both individual and group responsibility in decision making. Isely also involves parents as resource persons in the planning and development of learning experiences for their children.

The Isely program is designed for students with talent in academic subjects or in the performing arts. Students may be performing at or above grade level in certain subjects, but must possess high ability in some field. Such fields may include art, music, mathematics, science, creative writing, or physical skills. Opportunities are provided for pupils to develop leadership in areas of special ability and interest.

In addition to developing the basic academics and nurturing inherent abilities, Isely also provides added instruction in high-interest subject areas, using many of the basic subjects (math, science, language arts, etc.) for that instruction. Such high interest classes have included foreign languages, horticulture, woodworking, solar energy, cooking, and many others.

Isely's philosophy assumes that intelligence and creativity are human attributes which characterize children from all backgrounds and that children from each segment of society can profit from interacting with those from other segments. Isely is dedicated to development of intellectual potential in a multicultural setting.

Photo by John Freeman, Wichita Eagle Beacon

Kellogg Traditional Alternative School

Location: 1220 East Kellogg
Telephone: 263-0597
Grades served: K-8
Enrollment: 300

The Kellogg Traditional Alternative School was established by the Board of Education in December, 1975. Since education represents the most significant way to bridge various gaps in our society, the aim of the Traditional School is to provide educationally meaningful learning in a disciplined environment for all students. Each child should have the opportunity to develop to the highest possible degree his talents, capacities, and interests in a climate reflecting high standards of good citizenship demanded by staff, parents, students, and community.

The grading system at Kellogg is an attempt to inform parents concerning their child's progress in successfully accomplishing the academic skills. Letter grades, as well as effort grades, are given in each basic subject area.

Parents are responsible for cooperating with the school in areas of dress, positive attitudes, discipline, and health habits (adequate sleep and proper nutrition). Meaningful homework is assigned to help students become more self reliant, learn to work independently, improve the skills that have been taught, and complete assigned projects. Parents should encourage their children to take responsibility for their own homework, should see that it is completed, and should help in drill assignments on specific skills.

Kellogg staff and parents believe that effective learning cannot occur without a positive program of discipline. In the Traditional School, certain basic rules are consistent throughout all grade levels. The responsibility for basic behavior development rightfully belongs with the individual and his parents.

Discipline is firm but not stricter than is necessary to maintain a good learning situation. Students are expected to be respectful, follow the rules, and obey those in authority.

The key to the success of the Kellogg Traditional program is enthusiasm for it among parents and school staff members. During the child's early formative years, it is the teacher who directs his learning. After students have a firm educational foundation, they are then ready to make choices for themselves. Perhaps Kellogg's school motto expresses it best: "Success Takes Time."

Earhart Environmental Complex

Location: 4401 Arkansas Ave.
Telephone: 838-6771
Grades served: K-6
Enrollment: 175

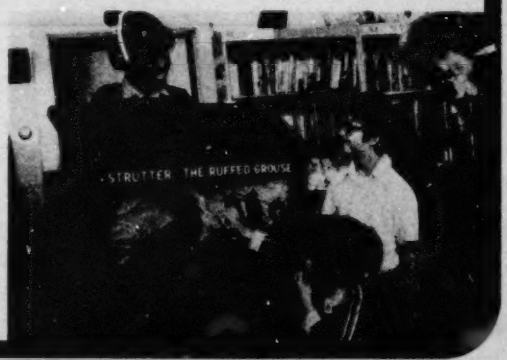
Earhart Environmental Complex is located on an eleven-acre plot of land at 4401 N. Arkansas Avenue, where students work in a nongraded, multi-age setting. The major purpose of this school is to develop an educational program conducive to learning through three main components: environmental education, continuous progress, and affective education.

"Environmental education," as defined by the E.E.C. staff, is the study of the dynamic interrelationships of ourselves and our surroundings. Earhart students are exposed to a wide variety of community resources, such as The Sedgwick County Zoo, Pawnee Prairie, government and city agencies, and a multitude of professional advisers. They are particularly fortunate to be able to work with staff and parents to develop their own ecology area. This developing area consists of a nature trail, pond, an area with native grasses and wild flowers, and a wooded area. The year culminates with schoolwide camping activities.

Earhart uses a continuous progress approach to the studying of reading and mathematics. As each child masters one level of achievement, the student advances to the next skill level — thus moving at his or her own speed rather than being tied to the group's rate. In their planning, faculty members also give consideration to different learning styles as well as learning rates.

The parent/teacher/child conference, instead of letter grades and report cards, is the method used to report to families. These conferences are also used to set goals for the next reporting period.

Earhart also stresses students' learning how to live with one another by dealing with differences, accepting responsibilities, and responding to feelings. Students are directed toward accepting responsibility for their decisions and behavior. The school tries to set an atmosphere of caring, both for self and for others.



Emerson Open Alternative School

Location: 445 North Waco
Telephone: 267-1934
Grades served: K-8
Enrollment: 150

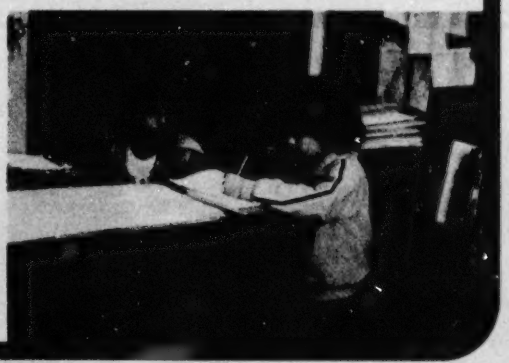
Emerson Open Alternative School is committed to a continuous, personalized process of learning which involves educating the whole child. The school actively involves parents, students, teachers, the school district, and the community at large working together for the child's benefit. The children are encouraged, within defined limits, to make responsible choices, to experience the basic skills, to become effective problem solvers, and to evaluate life experiences.

Centrally located in the downtown area, Emerson is an innovative school where children enjoy learning in a relaxed but stimulating environment. It capitalizes on its location, using inner-city resources to provide "real life" learning experiences.

Open education does not mean that each child has a license to do anything he or she wants to do. The children, staff, and parents all contribute in establishing citizenship guidelines each school year. Students are given various opportunities to make responsible choices and decisions. With the privilege of choosing also comes the responsibility of choosing a constructive activity. Each day the child works at learning to become more inner-directed and therefore more responsible.

Emerson is a nongraded school with students of various ages grouped together. Staff, parents, and students all participate in an ongoing evaluative process. Child/parent/teacher conferences are held four times a year to set goals, discuss progress, and deal with problems.

The parent plays many active roles at Emerson. Each parent is expected to share his or her time, energy, and resources to help support the school program. Parents are strongly encouraged to work regularly in the classroom and are expected to serve on committees, as well as participate in such special events as work nights, field trips, and social functions. One of the most exciting aspects of what Emerson can offer is the new relationship formed among children, parents, and staff working together on the child's behalf. The Emerson Open Alternative School philosophy incorporates the belief that there is a direct correlation between parent involvement and student motivation.



Alcott Alternative Learning Center

Location: 3400 East Murdock
Telephone: 685-6612
Grades served: 7-9
Enrollment: 100

Alcott Alternative Learning Center (formerly called the Munger Junior High Interest Center) was established as an alternative educational setting for the many Wichita junior high pupils who have not responded to more traditional approaches. Alcott is dedicated to the idea that individual differences and needs require personalization of learning. To personalize education, the Alcott staff uses diagnostic tools which help determine each student's unique learning style and skills. The student's program and its pace are then determined through the cooperation of student, staff, and parents.

Entrance tests are required for admission to Alcott. Students must demonstrate essential reading, writing, math, and social skills.

A wide variety of experiences and techniques are used to meet the needs of the students. One recent instructional activity at Alcott, for example, was the creation of videotape productions by students. All of the writing, direction, and production was done by students. Other examples of the instructional diversity at Alcott include art units on silversmithing, macrame, and related crafts and science projects involving construction of hot-air balloons and electric lamps.

Alcott strives to make students become more self-reliant, self-motivating, responsible for their own actions, and understanding of others. Curriculum units have been established in communications, mathematics, science, social studies, art, industrial arts, physical education, and computer applications.

Unlike most schools, the teaching staff at Alcott is also the counselling staff. This union marks the belief that counselling is a natural extension of a teacher's desire to help students get as much as possible out of classes and school. The school is also pledged to seek participatory governing mechanisms which will allow staff, students, and parents to share in the operation of Alcott.

Wichita High School Metro

Locations: 751 Geo. Wash. Blvd.
301 S. Meridian
Telephone: Boulevard — 263-3782
Meridian — 943-4961
Grades served: 10-12
Enrollment: 450

Wichita High School Metro, the first alternative program in the Wichita Public Schools, is an alternative high school designed to meet the educational needs of students who have not remained in the comprehensive (or "regular") high school until graduation. The goal of Metro is to help such students obtain their high school diplomas and enjoy a meaningful educational experience.

Although Metro now operates on two campuses (Boulevard and Meridian), the programs at the two locations are similar. Students may enter Metro at any time of the year and work on an individualized program based on their own rates of progress. Course credit is given when the work is completed. Classes are small so that more individual help and attention may be given. Student activities are centered around the informal atmosphere of the classroom and lounge.

Any resident of the school district who is between the ages of 16 and 21 and who either has been out of school for some time or is referred by the comprehensive high school is eligible to enroll at Metro. Students may have withdrawn or been withdrawn from the comprehensive high school for a variety of reasons: academic or attendance problems, health difficulties, conflict with employment, boredom, or other.

Metro helps individuals meet their goals in different ways. A student may complete his or her graduation requirements at Metro, or may choose eventually to return to a comprehensive high school. The student may enroll in college preparatory courses and continue education after high school, or may elect to enter the world of work with an appropriate educational background.

Among the curricular programs offered at Metro are language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, business education, home economics, industrial arts, and work experience. Students may also attend Metro while enrolled at the Wichita Area Vocational-Technical School.

Additional Information

If the alternative schools sound interesting to parents or students, how can they apply for admission — or at least get more information?

Each of the alternative schools generally has a waiting list for admission, so acceptance is not automatic. Students or parents who are interested in any of the alternative schools are encouraged to seek additional details or to arrange for a visit by calling that school. Formal application for admission may be done as follows:

APPLICATION TO
EARHART, EMERSON, ISELY, OR KELLOGG

- Except for special education students, youngsters who reside in the school district and who are in the appropriate grade are eligible to apply.
- Parents apply by completing a form at the public school office where the pupil would normally attend. Each student may apply for only one alternative school. Parents who have made application in previous years but who have not been accepted need to file an up-to-date application if they are still interested.
- A student who is currently attending an alternative school (and whose grade level next fall is served by that school) may continue in attendance without filing a new application.
- The selection process at each alternative school begins with a screening committee composed of a district office administrator, the principal, and at least one teacher and one parent. Each committee recommends to the Office of Elementary Education a list of pupils for assignment, and those who are assigned to the school will be notified by mail from the Office of Pupil Accounting in early or mid April. Principals of the alternative schools will give written notification to the parents of students not selected. Some of the factors considered in selection are racial and socioeconomic balance, ranges of achievement and ability, and school building capacity.

APPLICATION TO ALCOTT OR METRO

- Any resident of the school district whose age and grade level are appropriate is eligible to apply for admission to Alcott or Metro. Applications are accepted throughout the year, and assignments are made as class space is available.
- The parent or guardian should fill out a "Request for Special Transfer Form" at the junior high school the student would normally attend. The forms will then be forwarded to Alcott, and a time will be scheduled to interview the student and the parent and to test the student. Accepted students will be enrolled as soon as space is available.
- Students interested in Metro and presently enrolled in a comprehensive high school should consult the counselor at their present school. Students who are not presently enrolled in school should apply at either of the Metro campuses.